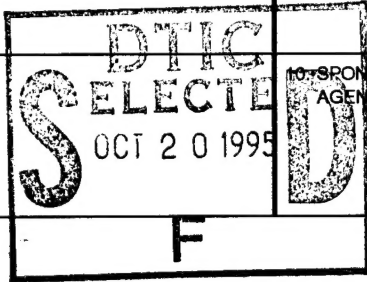


# REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188), Washington, DC 20503.

1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave Blank)		2. REPORT DATE April 2, 1993		3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED Final	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962: Comparative Perspectives of the United States and the Soviet Union				5. FUNDING NUMBERS	
6. AUTHOR(S) Ramón Miró					
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Federal Research Division Library of Congress Washington, DC 20540-5220				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) The Joint Staff (J-5) Department of Defense Washington, DC 20318-5126				10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER	
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Prepared under an Interagency Agreement					
12a. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.					
12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE					
13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words)  This study provides comparative perspectives of the October 1962 Cuban missile crisis. The purpose is to present briefly the alternative perceptions of the United States and the Soviet Union during the crisis, comparing these perceptions with each other and with current appraisals of the actual course of events. The major events of the crisis are summarized in chronological order, with the perspectives of the United States and the Soviet Union summarized separately. A current appraisal of the actual course of events, based on the most recent available declassified primary and secondary literature, is also provided.					
14. SUBJECT TERMS  Cuba Missile Crisis (1962)  United States -- Foreign Relations Soviet Union -- Foreign Relations				15. NUMBER OF PAGES 30	
				16. PRICE CODE	
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT  UNCLASSIFIED	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE  UNCLASSIFIED	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT  UNCLASSIFIED	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT  SAR		

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**THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS OF OCTOBER 1962:  
COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES OF  
THE UNITED STATES AND THE SOVIET UNION**

*A Report Prepared under an Interagency Agreement  
by the Federal Research Division,  
Library of Congress*

**April 2, 1993**

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**Federal Research Division  
Library of Congress  
Washington, DC 20540-5220**

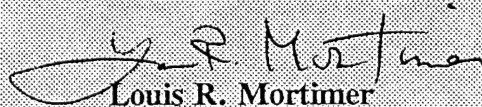
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## Preface

This study provides comparative perspectives of the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. The purpose is to present briefly the alternative perceptions of the United States and the Soviet Union during the crisis, comparing these perceptions with each other and with current appraisals of the actual course of events.

The major events of the missile crisis are summarized in chronological order, with the perspectives of the United States and the Soviet Union summarized separately. A current appraisal of the actual course of events, based on the most recent available declassified primary and secondary literature, is also provided.

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## Cuban Missile Crisis

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### **PRELUDE TO THE CRISIS**

#### The Soviet Decision to Deploy Nuclear Missiles in Cuba: April-July 1962

The deployment of missiles of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in Cuba was taken at the initiative of Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. The operation to introduce medium-range and intermediate-range ballistic missiles (MRBMs and IRBMs) was conceived by Khrushchev in April and was planned by the Soviet government from May to July 1962.

#### *The Soviet Perspective:*

Mid-April--While vacationing in the Crimea, Premier Khrushchev was alerted by Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Rodion Ya. Malinovsky to the presence of United States (US) Jupiter missiles just over the horizon in Turkey. Malinovsky informed Khrushchev that the US missiles in Turkey--which had become operational that month--were capable of striking the Soviet Union within ten minutes, whereas Soviet missiles launched from the USSR would require twenty-five minutes to strike the US. The proximity of US missiles in Turkey and Italy to the USSR was considered a major threat to the small Soviet intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) force, which had become vulnerable to decimation by a US nuclear first-strike. Khrushchev proposed that comparable Soviet missiles be based secretly in Cuba in order to quickly reduce the strategic imbalance and deter an expected US invasion of the island.<sup>1</sup>

Late April--In Moscow, Khrushchev discussed the proposed missile deployment to Cuba informally with First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers Anastas I. Mikoyan, who opposed the plan, considering it dangerously provocative toward the US and impractical from the standpoint of operational security.<sup>2</sup>

Early May--Deliberations regarding the possible installation of missiles in Cuba were held by a small ad hoc group of Soviet officials. The first meeting was attended by Premier Khrushchev, First Deputy Minister Mikoyan, Presidium Member Frol R. Kozlov, Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko, Marshal Malinovsky, and Marshal Sergei S. Biryuzov, Commander in Chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces. During the second meeting, in which the group was joined by the newly-designated Ambassador to Cuba, Aleksandr I. Alekseyev and Presidium Member Sharaf R. Rashidov, the group decided to proceed with the Cuban deployment, pending approval from the Cuban government. A secret delegation headed by Rashidov would be sent to Cuba to gain support from Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro Ruz.<sup>3</sup>



## Comparative Perspectives: US & USSR

May 29-30--A Soviet delegation arrived in Cuba to engage in secret negotiations on the installation of missile bases and to examine potential sites. On the second day of talks, the Cuban government granted the Soviets permission to install MRBMs and IRBMs on Cuban territory under Soviet control.<sup>4</sup>

July 2-17--A high-level Cuban military delegation headed by Commander of the Revolutionary Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias--FAR), General Raúl Castro travelled to Moscow to formalize the massive deployment of Soviet conventional and nuclear weapons to Cuba.<sup>5</sup>

### *The United States Perspective:*

April--US Jupiter missiles in Turkey became operational.

May 8-18--US naval, air and ground forces conducted Operation Whip Lash, a Caribbean military exercise designed to test contingency plans for a possible US invasion of Cuba. Although the US had no established intention of invading Cuba at the time, US forces engaged in extensive training for such a contingency throughout the summer and fall of 1962. Soviet and Cuban authorities claim to have interpreted Whip Lash and similar exercises as evidence of advanced US preparations to invade the island.

May 29-30--US intelligence failed to uncover the secret negotiations taking place in Cuba between Soviet and Cuban officials regarding the installation of Soviet missiles on the island.

July 17--US intelligence incorrectly concluded that the Cuban military mission to the USSR had failed to produce an agreement on the sale or transfer of Soviet weapons to Cuba. This conclusion was based on the absence of public announcements of an agreement by either Cuban or Soviet representatives. In fact, the Cuban mission succeeded in formalizing the secret agreement to install Soviet MRBMs and IRBMs in Cuba.

### The Soviet Conventional Weapons Buildup in Cuba: July-October 1962

The covert deployment of Soviet missiles in Cuba coincided with a large-scale buildup of Soviet conventional forces on the island, which included 42,000 Soviet combat personnel armed with state-of-the-art military equipment and, possibly, tactical nuclear weapons. The parallel deployments of troops and strategic missiles were successfully concealed from US intelligence until the missile installations were detected by a US U-2 high-altitude reconnaissance aircraft on October 14.

## Cuban Missile Crisis

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### *The Soviet Perspective:*

July-August--The Soviet missile deployment to Cuba was preceded by a series of negotiations between the Soviet and Cuban governments, which culminated in the drafting in August of a five-year renewable agreement between Cuba and the USSR on military cooperation and mutual defense.<sup>6</sup> Although the agreement was not signed by Moscow, it served as a framework for the Soviet deployment and arms transfers to Cuba.

July 25-October 24--Soviet combat personnel and conventional weapons were transported to Cuba. The weapons included an integrated Soviet air defense system comprising radars, 24 surface-to-air missile (SAM) antiaircraft battalions with 144 launchers, 42 MiG-21 interceptors, a coastal defense force comprising 18 cruise missile launchers, 12 Komar missile-carrying PT boats, and 42 Il-28 light bombers.<sup>7</sup> Discussions at the 1992 Havana Conference on the Cuban missile crisis revealed that the Soviet force may also have been equipped with nine rocket-launched tactical nuclear weapons, and that the local Soviet commander may have been authorized to fire these weapons in the event of a US invasion without further clearance from Moscow.<sup>8</sup>

### *The United States Perspective:*

July 25--The US was immediately alerted to the increased shipment of Soviet weapons to Cuba by aerial surveillance that showed a large number of Soviet ships bound for Cuba riding "high in the water," a common indicator of weapons deliveries. Eyewitness reports from Cuban refugees and French intelligence also alerted the US to the presence of large numbers of Soviet personnel in Cuba. These were not identified as a Soviet combat force until after the detection of the missile bases. The Soviet deployment was therefore initially interpreted as a conventional arms transfer involving some Soviet trainers and technicians, intended to strengthen Cuba's defensive capabilities.

August 21--In a special meeting of the National Security Council (NSC) held at the office of Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), John McCone discussed the possible significance of the stepped-up Soviet deployment to Cuba. Among the scenarios considered, McCone suggested the possibility that the Soviets might be constructing MRBM and IRBM bases in Cuba. McCone urged the NSC to consider imposing a naval quarantine of Cuba to avoid such an eventuality. In the absence of solid evidence proving missile base construction, however, the NSC could not find sufficient justification to take overt action against Cuba, and opted instead to accelerate covert efforts to destabilize the Castro government.<sup>9</sup>

August 22--A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) intelligence memorandum noted that an



## Comparative Perspectives: US & USSR

unusually large amount of Soviet military equipment had been transferred to Cuba since late July, estimating that up to 5,000 Soviet bloc personnel had recently disembarked at Cuban ports. Based on the scale of Soviet activity, the report concluded that "something new and different is taking place," and noted evidence suggesting the construction of a SAM air defense network and an electronic and communications intelligence-gathering station.<sup>10</sup>

September 3--The Department of State recommended that Soviet arms deliveries be accepted in principle as long as they were limited to defensive weapons, but that the US should publicly declare that it would not tolerate the introduction into Cuba of offensive, particularly nuclear, weapons.<sup>11</sup> The Soviet conventional weapons buildup in Cuba also prompted the US to accelerate the schedule of Operation MONGOOSE, a covert program of sabotage against the Castro government.

October 25--The combat role of Soviet personnel in Cuba was discovered by low-altitude aerial reconnaissance of the island, which showed Soviet armored groups deployed with their weaponry in combat configurations. US estimates of the size of the Soviet force rose incrementally during the crisis, finally reaching 22,000 by late October. The actual size of the Soviet force (42,000) was not known by the US until 1979.

### The Soviet Nuclear Weapons Buildup in Cuba: September 8-October 14, 1962

#### *The Soviet Perspective:*

September 2--A communiqué from the Soviet news agency Tass stated that representatives of the Cuban government had met with Soviet officials and had negotiated the transfer of armaments and the sending of Soviet technical specialists to Cuba.<sup>12</sup>

September 8--The Soviets began to ship missiles and support equipment to Cuba. The USSR originally intended to construct twenty-four SS-4 MRBM launchers and sixteen SS-5 IRBM launchers, with two missiles per launcher, for a total deployment of eighty missiles to Cuba to be deployed at four complexes.

Of the eighty missiles slated for transport to Cuba, forty-two of the SS-4 MRBMs arrived on the island before the US naval quarantine was established on October 24, whereas none of the SS-5 IRBMs ever made it to Cuba. The presence of warheads in Cuba has never been confirmed, yet recent statements by former Soviet officials suggest that twenty strategic warheads, in addition to the nine suspected tactical warheads, may have arrived in Cuba prior to the start of the quarantine.

## Cuban Missile Crisis

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Despite Soviet intentions to carry out the missile deployment in secrecy, no efforts were made to camouflage the missile sites from aerial reconnaissance until after the US publicly disclosed its U-2 flights. The lack of camouflage may have resulted from a failure by the Soviets to adapt standard missile-base construction practices to the special security requirements of deployment in Cuba.

September 11--Soviet Premier Khrushchev stated that the weapons being shipped to Cuba were exclusively for defensive purposes and that no nuclear missiles were being shipped to the island. Khrushchev stated that the Soviet Union had no need to deploy nuclear missiles beyond its borders because its missiles were powerful enough to reach any conceivable target from their bases in Soviet territory.<sup>13</sup>

### *The United States Perspective:*

Early September--US intelligence agencies began to consider the likelihood of a Soviet nuclear deployment in Cuba.

September 4--Attorney General Robert Kennedy met with Soviet Ambassador to the US Anatoly Dobrynin to seek assurances that the Soviet weapons transfers to Cuba consisted solely of defensive weapons and did not include offensive surface-to-surface missiles. Ambassador Dobrynin assured the Attorney General that only defensive weapons were being shipped to Cuba.<sup>14</sup>

September 4--Following the Kennedy-Dobrynin meeting, President Kennedy, believing that the Soviets did not intend to introduce nuclear missiles into Cuba, responded to the concerns of some members of Congress on the issue by stating publicly that weapons then in Cuba were defensive in nature and that there was no evidence of a Soviet combat force or of offensive missiles on the island. The President warned that "were it to be otherwise, the gravest issues would arise."<sup>15</sup>

September 13--President Kennedy issued a second public statement regarding Soviet weapons shipments to Cuba. The President reiterated his earlier remarks that the new Soviet shipments did not constitute a serious threat to any part of the Western Hemisphere.<sup>16</sup>

September 19--A CIA Special National Intelligence Estimate concluded that the USSR could derive considerable military advantage from the deployment of MRBMs and IRBMs in Cuba, but suggested that such action would be inconsistent with Soviet policy and past practice, as it would introduce an unprecedented level of risk in US-Soviet relations. An underlying assumption of this view was that the Soviets, aware of overwhelming US security interests and military capabilities in the Western Hemisphere, would not rationally choose Cuba as the theater for a superpower conflict.<sup>17</sup>

October 14--The missile bases were first photographed by a high-altitude U-2 aerial reconnaissance plane. The Soviets were not aware that the US had detected the missiles until Ambassador Dobrynin was informed by Secretary of State Rusk of the US discovery on the afternoon of October 22.

## CRISIS

### Secret Deliberation of the National Security Council After Discovery of the Missile Installations: October 16-22, 1962

#### *The United States Perspective:*

High-level policy discussion on the significance of the Cuban missile deployment and the formulation of a response was carried out by the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm), an ad hoc group of administration officials and presidential advisors convened to address the Cuban crisis. The ExComm's primary functions were to brief the President on day-to-day events, present and develop strategies for dealing with Soviet actions, assess US readiness and capabilities, and consider Soviet intentions and possible reactions.

Transcripts of the secretly recorded ExComm discussions show that the ExComm was a central actor during the first week of the crisis, playing a supporting but less pivotal role during the second week. After confirming the presence of missiles in Cuba, the ExComm briefly discussed possible Soviet intentions. The consensus was that the Cuban deployment was somehow related to Soviet ambitions in Europe and to Khrushchev's personal preoccupation with Berlin.

October 16-21--Members of the ExComm were invited to present options for US action, first individually and later as working groups, that coalesced around the most plausible alternatives. By October 21 the recommended alternatives consisted of two general strategies: (1) immediate military action to destroy the missiles through a surprise air strike on the launch sites and Cuban air bases, and preparations for invasion; or (2) public announcement of the discovery of the missiles, followed by a naval quarantine of Cuba to intercept further weapons shipments, intense diplomatic pressure to force their removal, and preparations for further military action.

Early discussion within the ExComm tended to favor an immediate air strike, but uncertainty over the readiness status of the missiles and the danger of Soviet military reaction

## Cuban Missile Crisis

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in Europe shifted the focus toward the more flexible quarantine option. A response based solely on diplomacy, as advocated by US Ambassador to the United Nations (UN) Adlai Stevenson, was dismissed early on as insufficient. The ExComm transcripts show that US decision makers, particularly the President, felt compelled to respond militarily in light of recent US policy statements that warned the Soviets not to introduce nuclear missiles to Cuba. The fact that such missiles were introduced secretly seemed to warrant further direct action by the US.

### *The Soviet Perspective:*

Available evidence suggests that the Soviets severely misjudged the manner in which the US would react to the missile deployment. Soviet decision makers overestimated the domestic and international pressures that might have compelled the US to accept a Soviet fait accompli of secretly installed missiles.

Soviet statements prior to the crisis indicate that Premier Khrushchev intended to announce the missile deployment sometime in November 1962. Khrushchev believed that the Soviet missiles in Cuba could be justified on the basis of their similarity to US missiles in Turkey.

Moscow apparently did not anticipate the strong US reaction to the deception that had surrounded the Cuban missile deployment.<sup>18</sup> The secret nature of the buildup in Cuba invalidated later Soviet claims that their installations there were comparable to US Jupiter missile bases in Turkey. Washington maintained that a key difference between the two operations was that US missiles in Turkey were installed openly in accordance with a publicly acknowledged agreement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), whereas the Soviet-Cuban Agreement on Military Cooperation and Mutual Defense was negotiated and implemented in secrecy. Moreover, the US argued that Turkey was a legitimate recipient of large-scale US military assistance based on its NATO membership, whereas Cuba was not a member of the Warsaw Pact.

The Soviets also failed to anticipate the nearly unanimous support for the US quarantine among Latin American countries and the success with which the US would invoke the Treaty of Interamerican Reciprocal Assistance of 1947 (Rio Treaty) to reaffirm the special security relationships within the hemisphere. Moscow may also have expected Western European governments to restrain the US from precipitating a crisis that would compromise European security.

Imposition of the Naval Quarantine of Cuba: October 24-November 20, 1962

The imposition of a US naval quarantine of Cuba was announced by President Kennedy during his address to the nation on the evening of October 22. The quarantine order, which became effective on October 24 and remained in effect until November 20, was intended to prevent further shipments of offensive weapons to Cuba. Throughout the operation, an average of 46 warships, including the Enterprise and Independence aircraft carrier battle groups, 240 aircraft, and approximately 30,000 personnel were directly involved in the quarantine effort. These forces were arrayed in three major task groups along a broad arc 800 miles off the eastern coast of the Cuba.<sup>19</sup>

All ships approaching Cuba were tracked, and, upon reaching the quarantine line, were to be boarded and inspected for offensive military cargoes. In theory, the US task force had standing orders to disable and forcefully board vessels that ignored hailings to halt and be inspected. Vessels found to be carrying offensive military cargoes would be ordered to turn back or else be impounded.<sup>20</sup> In actual practice, the boarding order was applied selectively on a case-by-case basis as individual ships approached the quarantine line. Throughout the crisis, the quarantine operation was closely supervised by the President and the Secretary of Defense.

*The United States Perspective:*

From the perspective of US policymakers, the quarantine represented a middle course between the alternatives of negotiation or outright military action through an air strike. US decision makers believed that it allowed the US flexibility in demonstrating its resolve without provocatively destroying Soviet military assets.<sup>21</sup> The quarantine also provided the Soviets with time to reconsider and modify their behavior and it shifted on them some of the responsibility for escalation. US decision makers believed, however, that the quarantine by itself would not compel the Soviets to remove the missiles already in Cuba, and that further measures would have to be contemplated to gain their withdrawal.

The US had generally accurate intelligence throughout the crisis on which Soviet vessels carried missile components and other offensive weapons. US Navy reconnaissance planes spotted all Soviet ships bound for Cuba and plotted their position, speed, and direction.<sup>22</sup>

US policymakers could not anticipate whether Soviet ships would run the blockade and how Soviet crews would respond to forcible boarding if it became necessary. Nor could they accurately predict the general Soviet military reaction to a potential armed clash at sea. There was considerable uncertainty over the role that Soviet submarines would play in

## Cuban Missile Crisis

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escorting Cuba-bound surface ships and whether the submarines were under standing orders to use force against quarantine forces.

### *The Soviet Perspective:*

Available evidence suggests that the Soviets failed to uncover US plans for a naval quarantine prior to the Kennedy announcement of October 22, and that they did not contemplate the growing likelihood of discovery and naval interception during the latter stages of their covert deployment to Cuba.<sup>23</sup> This corresponds to the fact that only a small token force of Soviet attack submarines was available for escort duty in the wake of the Kennedy announcement, and that no prepositioning or alerts of the Soviet Atlantic fleet had been undertaken in anticipation of US moves.

The placement of nuclear weapons near the end of the Soviet shipping schedule to Cuba gave the US an opportunity to intercept roughly one-third of the missiles and possibly all of the warheads at sea. A potential confrontation between US warships and Soviet transports and submarines bound for Cuba was avoided when the latter halted their approach and reversed course on October 24.

## United States Public Diplomacy to Compel Withdrawal of the Missiles: October 22-28, 1962

### *The United States Perspective:*

An aggressive campaign of public diplomacy against Soviet actions in Cuba was central to US policy during the Cuban missile crisis.

October 16-22--The diplomatic component of the US crisis strategy began when US diplomats secretly obtained support for the quarantine of Cuba from key US allies.

October 22--President Kennedy addressed the nation to reveal the presence of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba and to announce the US quarantine of the island. In his address, the President outlined the legal basis for US action, invoking the right to enforce regional security arrangements under Article 53 of the United Nations Charter. The corresponding regional arrangement in this instance was the Treaty of Interamerican Reciprocal Assistance of 1947, which, under Articles 6 and 8, authorized collective defense of Western Hemisphere nations against extra-hemispheric powers.



## Comparative Perspectives: US & USSR

October 23--The US diplomatic offensive achieved a key victory at the Organization of American States (OAS) when a unanimous vote of the member states condemned the missiles as a threat to peace and called for their removal.

October 25--The US attained a second important diplomatic victory when Ambassador Stevenson publicly released the U-2 photographs of the missile bases in Cuba at a special session of the UN Security Council, discrediting Soviet claims that only defensive weapons were being shipped to Cuba.<sup>24</sup>

### *The Soviet Perspective:*

The USSR failed to anticipate the US plan to announce publicly the secret Soviet missile deployment to Cuba on October 22. Moscow therefore took no steps to preempt the US announcement and thus avoid international censure.

The Soviets also failed to respond to the US diplomatic initiative. Despite their awareness that photographic evidence of their missile deployment in Cuba was available to the US, the Soviets denied that any such deployment was taking place until October 28, three days after the US had released photographs of the offending missile sites at the UN. By declining to publicly address US charges, the USSR made it possible for the US to outmaneuver Soviet diplomats and discredit Soviet positions in international forums.

The USSR, in addition, failed to anticipate the unanimous support for the US blockade that would emerge from the Latin American countries in the OAS, and the success with which the US would invoke the Rio Treaty in asserting the special security relationships among Western Hemisphere nations.<sup>25</sup>

### The United States Military Response: October 16-28, 1962

#### *The United States Perspective:*

In addition to putting into effect a naval quarantine of Cuba, the US armed forces were directed to prepare for further military action to remove the missile bases or to respond to Soviet military challenges. The mobilization of US forces consisted of three general missions: (1) deployment of air forces in preparation for an air strike against selected military targets in Cuba; (2) deployment and concentration of US ground forces in preparation for an invasion of Cuba; and (3) a high-level alert of US strategic bomber and missile forces in preparation for general war.

## Cuban Missile Crisis

October 22--The Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered the readiness status of US forces worldwide to be raised to Defense Condition Three (DEFCON 3).<sup>26</sup>

October 24--Strategic Air Command (SAC) forces were placed on a higher, DEFCON 2 alert. As part of the DEFCON 2, a "one-eighth" airborne alert was put into effect, requiring one out of every eight nuclear-armed B-52 bombers to be airborne at any given moment. The B-47 medium bomber force was dispersed among thirty-three civilian and military airfields nationwide to reduce its vulnerability to Soviet bombardment. More than 100 Atlas and Titan ICBMs were also placed on alert.<sup>27</sup>

The US military mobilization was designed to achieve both practical and psychological objectives. Military preparedness demanded immediate mobilization of US forces in order to reduce vulnerability and provide opportunities for timely action. The general alert was also intended to deter Soviet military challenges by demonstrating US resolve and revealing Soviet strategic inferiority.<sup>28</sup>

### *The Soviet Perspective:*

The Soviet Union appears to have anticipated strong localized military pressure by the US against Cuba upon discovery of the missile bases, as evidenced by the large Soviet military contingent stationed on the island to deter invasion. However, Moscow apparently did not expect the US to declare a nuclear crisis involving a global US military alert. As a result, Soviet nuclear forces remained at a normal level of preparedness throughout the crisis, possibly deterred from upgrading force readiness by the danger that any move on their part might provoke a preemptive strike by better-prepared US strategic forces.<sup>29</sup>

Despite their initial misreading of the US reaction, Moscow was well informed of US military preparations after October 22. Soviet surveillance of US military activities was facilitated by the sheer scale of the mobilizations and by high-profile displays of US military might. As part of a deliberate campaign of psychological warfare, the US made little effort to conceal the alerts and mobilizations of its forces after October 22. One such instance of psychological warfare may have occurred when the SAC Commander in Chief transmitted the orders to assume DEFCON 2 "in the clear" through open channels of communication, presumably to facilitate Soviet detection and display confidence in the overwhelming superiority of US strategic forces.

The Soviet Military Response: October 22-28, 1962

*The Soviet Perspective:*

Soviet military behavior during the crisis was generally restrained. The Soviet Union took almost no military action in response to the massive mobilization and heightened readiness of US forces.

October 23--The USSR and Warsaw Pact headquarters publicly announced alerts of their conventional forces. These had minimal practical effect, however, involving mainly symbolic steps such as the cancellation of military leaves.<sup>30</sup>

October 22-28--Moscow declined to match US strategic preparedness efforts, foregoing even basic precautionary measures such as airstrip alerts of its strategic bomber force.<sup>31</sup>

October 22-November 20--The Soviet naval response to the quarantine was generally restrained. At no point during the crisis did the Soviet Atlantic fleet set sail for Cuba or take any significant steps to reinforce Soviet naval forces approaching the quarantine area. The most likely reason for the lack of a major Soviet naval response was the deterrent effect of the overwhelming US naval presence in the Caribbean. The Soviets may also have been deterred from reinforcing their submarine forces in the Caribbean by their knowledge of the capabilities of NATO's antisubmarine warfare (ASW) net in the North Atlantic.

October 22-November 20--The response of Soviet vessels directly involved in the convoy to Cuba was initially confrontational but became increasingly compliant with minor exceptions. Despite isolated challenges to US forces, in which Soviet tankers refused inspection and continued toward Cuba, Soviet weapons transports did not attempt to cross the quarantine line.

October 22-28--The primary instance of Soviet military provocation during the crisis was the continuation of construction by Soviet technicians of the MRBM sites in Cuba. After October 22, work on the sites was performed on a 24-hour basis to bring them to operational status as quickly as possible.

October 27--A Soviet SAM shot down a US U-2 on a reconnaissance overflight of Cuba, killing its pilot. The incident, which appeared to be a deliberate challenge to the US, was in fact an independent action by Soviet air defense commanders in Cuba. From the perspective of Soviet authorities in Moscow, who at the time were seeking a negotiated solution to the crisis, the shootdown was unintended and accidental.

In contrast to the main Soviet forces, Cuban military and militia forces were rapidly mobilized and placed on highest alert on October 23. Cuban sources claim to have mobilized

## Cuban Missile Crisis

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forty-eight divisions totalling 270,000 troops.<sup>32</sup> Cuban antiaircraft batteries were given standing orders to fire on US reconnaissance aircraft and inflicted damage on at least one low-flying US plane.

### *The United States Perspective:*

The absence of significant Soviet military preparations was noted by US intelligence.

October 24--The US was immediately alerted to the retreat of most of the Soviet weapons transports that had been approaching Cuba and ordered US warships to refrain from engaging Soviet vessels.

October 27--A CIA Daily Report noted that no significant mobilization of Soviet ground, air, or naval forces had been detected.<sup>33</sup>

### Military Encounters Between United States and Soviet Forces: October 24-27, 1962

US and Soviet forces engaged in hostilities on two separate occasions during the Cuban missile crisis and may have narrowly avoided a local nuclear exchange during a third incident:

October 24--US naval forces at the quarantine line fired low-powered depth charges at the submarine escorts of approaching Soviet transports, forcing the submarines to surface and partially disabling at least one Soviet vessel.<sup>34</sup>

October 27--An air engagement appears to have been narrowly avoided when a US U-2 reconnaissance plane on a routine air-sampling mission experienced a navigational error that caused it to accidentally stray into Soviet airspace over the Chukotski Peninsula, near Alaska. The U-2 incursion was detected by the Soviets, who scrambled their MiG fighters in the area to intercept the U-2. Responding to the U-2's distress signal, several US F-102 fighter aircraft, possibly armed with nuclear air-to-air missiles, also scrambled to assist the U-2. An engagement was avoided when the U-2 successfully exited Soviet airspace without incident.

October 27--Two hours after the U-2 incursion over the USSR, another U-2 on a reconnaissance overflight of Cuba was shot down by a Soviet SAM battery. The U-2 pilot was killed.

*The United States Perspective:*

Incidents of military action between US and Soviet forces alerted US policymakers to the high risks of inadvertent escalation and demonstrated the limitations of crisis management by nuclear powers. Within the ExComm, the President and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara became acutely aware of the dangers of inadvertent escalation as the crisis progressed.

October 24--Although the ExComm was aware that low-powered depth charges were being used to compel Soviet submarines approaching the quarantine line to surface, the ExComm was apparently not aware that such charges were being used in a manner that would disable Soviet submarines.<sup>35</sup>

October 27--Upon being informed of the accidental incursion into Soviet airspace by the US U-2, President Kennedy ordered all air sampling missions near the USSR to be cancelled, but did not to raise the incident before the Soviets. An apology was later issued to the Soviet government in response to a Soviet protest over the incursion that appeared in Premier Khrushchev's private communiqué to President Kennedy of October 28.<sup>36</sup>

October 27--The ExComm could not determine with certainty the circumstances surrounding the U-2 downing over Cuba. In order to allow for the possibility that the shootdown was unauthorized, and to avoid an unwarranted escalation of the crisis, the President intervened to block execution of standing orders to retaliate by air strike against the offending SAM installation. In the event of further U-2 downings, however, the President was prepared to reconsider selective air strikes against the SAM installations involved. In a November 8 memorandum to the ExComm, the President formally rejected automatic reprisal and called for continuing high-level consideration of specific incidents. The President also instructed the ExComm to draft a message to Premier Khrushchev outlining the US policy of measured retaliation in case of further downings of U-2s over Cuba.<sup>37</sup>

*The Soviet Perspective:*

October 24--Faced with an overwhelming US naval presence and lacking readily available reinforcements, Soviet submarines subjected to the aggressive use of depth charges by US quarantine forces declined to take effective countermeasures. Soviet captains may have calculated that any aggressive action against US ships would have resulted in the destruction of their vessels. The vulnerability to seizure by the US of highly valuable Soviet missiles and warheads aboard Soviet transports approaching Cuba may also have constrained Soviet options.<sup>38</sup>

October 27--The US U-2 incursion into Soviet airspace, which could have been

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misinterpreted by the Soviets as a preparatory reconnaissance mission for a preemptive US nuclear attack, did not elicit a large-scale military response from the USSR. Soviet strategic forces may have withheld their response because Soviet decision makers recognized the accidental nature of the incident or because they were reluctant to confront superior US strategic forces without clearer provocation.

October 27--Soviet decision makers in Moscow became aware of the downing of the U-2 over Cuba after the fact. The shootdown was not authorized by the Soviet national command, nor by the overall commander of Soviet forces in Cuba, but was instead an independent action taken at the initiative of a local Soviet air defense commander, identified at the 1989 Moscow Conference on the missile crisis as General Georgy A. Voronkov.<sup>39</sup> General Voronkov apparently interpreted vague standing orders to resist a US attack on Cuba as authorization to fire on US reconnaissance aircraft overflying the island. The shootdown apparently contravened Soviet policy at the time, as suggested by the fact that the officers involved were reprimanded and standing orders were subsequently clarified to prohibit firing upon US reconnaissance aircraft.<sup>40</sup>

## **CRISIS RESOLUTION**

### The Kennedy-Khrushchev Correspondence: October 22-28, 1962

The series of personal exchanges between President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev were the principal method of negotiation during the crisis. Eleven messages were transmitted by the political leadership of the US and the USSR from October 22 to October 28. An additional twelve messages were sent from October 28 to November 20, in which previously stated positions were clarified and the removal of Soviet Il-28 bombers from Cuba was negotiated in exchange for a lifting of the US quarantine.

#### *The United States Perspective:*

Four communiqués were sent to Premier Khrushchev by President Kennedy during the critical phase of the missile crisis:

October 22--President Kennedy accused the Soviet Union of attempting to disrupt the global balance of power by introducing bases for nuclear missiles and other offensive weapons into Cuba. The President asserted US resolve to remove this new threat to hemispheric security.<sup>41</sup>



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October 23--President Kennedy charged the Soviet government with responsibility for the secret weapons shipments to Cuba.<sup>42</sup>

October 25--President Kennedy argued that the Soviet Union had deliberately provoked a crisis by ignoring clear US warnings not to introduce missiles into Cuba and by deploying its offensive weapons secretly.<sup>43</sup>

October 27--Faced with two contradictory Soviet messages on conditions for a negotiated settlement to the crisis, President Kennedy responded by accepting the first, more conciliatory, Soviet communiqué, in which Premier Khrushchev offered to order the dismantling of the Cuban bases and the return of missiles to the Soviet Union under UN inspection in exchange for a US pledge not to invade Cuba and a lifting of the quarantine. The US disregarded the second Soviet message, which, in addition to the above conditions, required the US publicly to announce the dismantling of Jupiter missile bases in Turkey.<sup>44</sup>

### *The Soviet Perspective:*

Seven communiqués were sent to President Kennedy by Premier Khrushchev:

October 23--Responding to President Kennedy's public announcement of the quarantine, Premier Khrushchev accused the US of aggression against Cuba and the Soviet Union, and of violation of the UN Charter and the laws of navigation. The message denied the presence of offensive weapons in Cuba.<sup>45</sup>

October 24--Premier Khrushchev rejected any type of ultimatum by the US regarding removal of the missiles.<sup>46</sup>

October 26--Premier Khrushchev reiterated his claim of the defensive nature of Soviet weapons in Cuba and recommended mutual acceptance of an interim UN agreement.<sup>47</sup>

October 27--Responding to Soviet intelligence reports from the night of October 25-26 that noted US military preparations for an imminent invasion of Cuba, Premier Khrushchev sought an immediate end to the crisis by offering to dismantle the missile bases in exchange for a US pledge not to invade Cuba.<sup>48</sup>

October 27--In response to revised Soviet intelligence memoranda, which estimated the danger of a US invasion of Cuba as more remote than previously reported, Premier Khrushchev transmitted a second message to President Kennedy which toughened the Soviet position by adding removal of US missiles from Turkish bases as a new condition for withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba.<sup>49</sup>

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October 28--Reacting to renewed Soviet intelligence reports that a US attack on Cuba was imminent, and apparently alarmed by Soviet command and control failures and the apparent bellicosity and unpredictability of the Cuban FAR, Premier Khrushchev accepted the original terms for withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. The USSR would remove under UN inspection its weapons in Cuba that President Kennedy described as "offensive," in exchange for a US pledge not to invade Cuba and a prompt lifting of the US naval quarantine.<sup>50</sup>

October 28--An additional message from Khrushchev attempted to formalize the secret US concession to remove its Jupiter missiles in Turkey in exchange for the withdrawal of Soviet missiles in Cuba. This message was not acknowledged by the US.<sup>51</sup>

### Informal Negotiations: October 22-28, 1962

In addition to the exchanges between President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev, negotiations to resolve the missile crisis were carried out through two informal channels. One such channel was established by Attorney General Kennedy and Ambassador Dobrynin. A second channel was established by ABC News correspondent John Scali and the chief of the KGB's Washington station, Aleksandr Fomin.

The parties to the secret negotiations served as spokesmen for their respective governments, relaying confidential proposals for resolution of the crisis and conducting face-to-face talks that helped defuse tensions and contributed to a peaceful settlement on October 28. There were at least three Kennedy-Dobrynin meetings and three Scali-Fomin meetings during the crisis.

### *The United States Perspective:*

Attorney General Kennedy met secretly with Ambassador Dobrynin on three occasions during the crisis:

October 23--At the first meeting, held at the Soviet Embassy, the Attorney General expressed the strong objection of the US to the deception that had been used to introduce Soviet missiles into Cuba.<sup>52</sup>

October 26--According to Ambassador Dobrynin and other Soviet sources, Attorney General Kennedy, at the direction of the President, first raised the possibility of a quid pro quo removal of US missiles in Turkey in exchange for withdrawal of Soviet missiles in Cuba.<sup>53</sup>

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October 27--Soviet and US accounts of the discussions during the third meeting differ. Robert Kennedy's memoir on the missile crisis states that the meeting was held to inform the Soviets of the imminent threat of US military action in the absence of an immediate peaceful resolution to the crisis. Concurrently, the US reaffirmed its intention to withdraw Jupiter missiles from Turkey within a short time once the crisis was peacefully resolved. According to Kennedy, the US declined any quid pro quo withdrawal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey in exchange for Soviet dismantling of missile bases in Cuba.<sup>54</sup>

John Scali met informally with KGB Washington Station Chief Aleksandr Fomin on three occasions during the crisis. The first meeting was initiated by Fomin, in what appears to have been an independent effort to explore options for resolving the crisis. The two later meetings received official backing and were held at Scali's request. These took place in a hotel restaurant near the Soviet Embassy.

October 26--Scali met with Fomin at the latter's request and was encouraged to approach officials at the Department of State with a proposal for resolution of the crisis in which the missiles in Cuba would be removed under UN supervision and Castro would pledge not to accept future shipments of offensive weapons in exchange for a lifting of the quarantine and a US pledge not to invade Cuba.<sup>55</sup>

October 26--7:35 PM--Scali met with Fomin and relayed a message from Secretary of State Rusk expressing US interest in the proposal of October 26 and urging that it be immediately formalized at the UN.<sup>56</sup>

October 27--Scali met with Fomin after receipt of the Khrushchev letter that added withdrawal of US missiles in Turkey as a condition for a settlement. Scali accused the Soviets of betrayal in abandoning their original proposal and warned of imminent US military action against the missiles in Cuba if a settlement were not achieved forthwith.<sup>57</sup>

### *The Soviet Perspective:*

#### Kennedy-Dobrynin meetings:

October 23--Ambassador Dobrynin, responding to Attorney General Kennedy's charge of Soviet duplicity in introducing missiles to Cuba, revealed that he had not been informed of the deployment.

October 26--Ambassador Dobrynin defended the right of the Soviet Union to install missiles in Cuba by comparing them to US missiles in Turkey. According to Dobrynin, Attorney General Kennedy responded by offering to introduce US missiles in Turkey into a potential settlement of the crisis.<sup>58</sup>

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October 27--According to Ambassador Dobrynin and other Soviet sources, Ambassador Dobrynin accepted an explicit deal from Attorney General Kennedy to remove US missiles in Turkey as part of a settlement of the missile crisis.<sup>59</sup>

Scali-Fomin meetings:

October 26--Fomin presented his first proposal for a resolution of the missile crisis. Soviet participants at the 1989 Moscow conference on the Cuban missile crisis claimed that the first Fomin proposal was made without authorization from Moscow.<sup>60</sup>

October 27--Fomin acknowledged Secretary of State Rusk's favorable reaction to the proposed crisis resolution terms as relayed by Scali, and informed Moscow of the informal US response.

October 27--Responding to Scali's charge of duplicity in Soviet negotiation, Fomin assured Scali that no duplicity was intended and that the introduction of new conditions by the Soviets resulted from a communications failure. Fomin relayed the US warning of an invasion to higher authorities in Moscow.<sup>61</sup>

### Resolution of the Crisis: October 27-28, 1962

The Cuban missile crisis was resolved bilaterally through an informal agreement between the US and the USSR. The terms of the agreement were established in the Kennedy-Khrushchev correspondence and in the secret meetings of US and Soviet representatives. Cuba, which opposed withdrawal of the missiles, was not a party to the negotiations. The final agreement required the USSR to dismantle its missile-launching installations in Cuba and return the missiles and other "offensive weapons" to the USSR. Ships carrying missiles returning to the USSR from Cuba were subject to boarding and close naval and aerial surveillance by US quarantine forces.

One of the terms of the agreement, that of on-site inspection of the dismantled missile sites by the UN, remained unfulfilled after the Cuban government refused to allow UN inspection of its territory. In addition to the missiles, recently transferred Il-28 bombers, which fell under the category of "offensive weapons," were also required to be returned to the USSR.

In response to the Soviet missile withdrawal and a Soviet pledge not to reintroduce offensive weapons into Cuba, President Kennedy ordered the lifting of the naval quarantine of Cuba on November 20, 1962, and informally pledged not to invade the island. The US

also gave private assurances to the USSR that its Jupiter missiles in Turkey would be withdrawn within a short time after resolution of the crisis. In accordance with this secret agreement, the US began to dismantle its Jupiter installations in Turkey six months after the crisis was settled.

*The United States Perspective:*

The most critical US decision making on resolution of the missile crisis occurred on October 27 and 28:

October 27--4:00 PM--The ExComm met to discuss the two most recent messages received that morning from Premier Khrushchev. The first message proposed milder terms for a resolution of the crisis than the second, more demanding message that called for a public "trade" involving mutual withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba and US Jupiter missiles from Turkey. President Kennedy decided to partly concede on the Jupiter missile issue by privately assuring the Soviets of US intentions to withdraw the Jupiters shortly after a peaceful settlement of the crisis. In addition, the President instructed the Attorney General to warn Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin of the imminent possibility of US military action against the missiles in Cuba in the absence of an immediate settlement.<sup>62</sup>

October 27--7:45 PM--At the third and final meeting between Attorney General Kennedy and Ambassador Dobrynin during the crisis, the latter was informed of the possibility of imminent US military action against the missiles in Cuba unless an agreement on their withdrawal was quickly reached. As an incentive for speedy resolution of the dispute, Dobrynin was assured that US Jupiter missiles in Turkey would be withdrawn soon after a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

October 27--8:05 PM--A letter from President Kennedy was transmitted to Moscow. The letter responded to the proposal contained in the first, more conciliatory of the two Khrushchev messages received that morning.

October 27--9:00 PM--The ExComm met to review military contingency planning and readiness for an invasion of Cuba.

October 27--evening--President Kennedy instructed Secretary of State Rusk to contact Andrew Cordier, a former UN undersecretary. Cordier was given the text of a compromise settlement of the crisis in which US missiles in Turkey were publicly "traded" for Soviet missiles in Cuba. Cordier was told to stand by and await instructions from Rusk to approach Acting UN Secretary General U Thant with the proposal. Secretary General U Thant would have been asked to offer the proposal to both sides as a UN-initiated agreement, to which the US would have acceded.<sup>63</sup>

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October 28--morning--A CIA Daily Report reported that all twenty-four MRBM launchers in Cuba were operational. The readiness status of the missiles was not known, although it was assumed that these, too, were operational.<sup>64</sup>

October 28--9:00 AM--A radio broadcast message from Premier Khrushchev ended the missile crisis by accepting the terms for resolution offered by the US the previous day. Khrushchev agreed to withdraw "the weapons which you describe as offensive" in exchange for a lifting of the quarantine and a US pledge not to invade Cuba.<sup>65</sup>

### *The Soviet Perspective:*

October 25--Soviet intelligence may have reported hard evidence of US preparations for an imminent attack on Cuba, prompting Premier Khrushchev to send his "first" crisis settlement proposal to President Kennedy.<sup>66</sup>

October 26--Cuban Prime Minister Castro transmitted a letter to Premier Khrushchev warning of an imminent US invasion of Cuba and urging the USSR to retaliate against the US in the event of such an attack. Castro's Spanish-language letter to Khrushchev was apparently misconstrued by the Soviets as a recommendation for a preemptive strike against the US. Castro's letter may have raised concerns over the ability of Soviet forces to maintain control over the missiles.<sup>67</sup>

October 26--A revised Soviet intelligence estimate of the likelihood of a US attack on Cuba that assessed the threat as less imminent than previously believed may have prompted Premier Khrushchev to toughen Soviet terms for a withdrawal of the missiles in his "second" settlement proposal.<sup>68</sup>

October 27--According to Ambassador Dobrynin and other Soviet sources, during the third Kennedy-Dobrynin meeting, Ambassador Dobrynin agreed to an explicit deal with Attorney General Kennedy whereby the US would remove Jupiter missiles in Turkey in exchange for a withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba.<sup>69</sup>

October 27-28--Soviet intelligence may have calculated once again that a US attack on Cuba was imminent. Such an estimate would have been corroborated by Prime Minister Castro's letter to Premier Khrushchev on October 26, which warned of impending US military action against Cuba.<sup>70</sup>

October 28--9:00 AM--Premier Khrushchev, upon being informed once again by Soviet intelligence that a US invasion of Cuba was imminent, and apparently fearing provocative action against the US by the Cuban FAR, ended the crisis by drafting a letter to President Kennedy that restored the original settlement terms issued in the "first" Khrushchev proposal of October 27. In the letter, transmitted simultaneously by Radio Moscow and by diplomatic



telegram, Khrushchev agreed to remove "offensive weapons" from Cuba under UN supervision and to refrain from reintroducing such weapons in exchange for a US noninvasion pledge toward Cuba and a prompt lifting of the US naval quarantine. Soviet intelligence was apparently unaware of possible US plans to concede a public trade of Jupiter missiles in Turkey for Soviet missiles in Cuba at the initiative of the UN. Instead, the USSR accepted a secret, informal agreement for withdrawal of US missiles from Turkey in exchange for a publicly acknowledged withdrawal of Soviet offensive weapons from Cuba.<sup>71</sup>

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